

Planning and Zoning Briefing: Answers to Preliminary Briefing Questions

What are the adopted policies and vision for the Highlands?

Renton's Comprehensive Plan contains the adopted policies and vision for the Highlands. The Highlands area is one of three designated "Centers" in the Comprehensive Plan (the historic downtown and the Landing area are the others). Although development should be compact, urban, and with a mix of commercial and residential uses, the Comprehensive Plan envisions redevelopment at a smaller scale in the Highlands than in the other centers. As a "Center Village" the Highlands will provide a concentration of goods and services to serve a larger area and become a focal point along the Coal Creek Corridor.

The heart of the Highlands area is designated as "Center Village" in the Comprehensive Plan. This area includes the commercial areas along Sunset Blvd. and much of the original World War II housing surrounding it. Adopted policies for the Center Village aim to create a compact, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood centered around commercial and recreational amenities that serve the immediate area and beyond.

Beyond the Center Village area are several other land use designations in the Task Force Study Area, each with their own policies and vision. Commercial designations include the Commercial Corridor (CC) area near Renton Technical College and the shopping area near Union Avenue and the Commercial Neighborhood (CN) designation on the corner of SR900 and Edmonds. Commercial Corridor areas are envisioned as concentrated commercial districts along high traffic volume corridors that provide the goods and services for daily living to nearby neighborhoods. Commercial Neighborhood areas are described as providing convenience goods for those who live nearby.

Residential designations include Residential Single Family (RS), Residential Medium Density (RMD), and Residential Multi-Family (RMF). Single Family designation is intended for high quality neighborhoods of detached, single family residences. Medium Density designation is described as creating opportunity for a variety of housing types and ownership options that incorporates features of both single family and multi family development. Multi-family designation is envisioned as encouraging a range of multi-family environments that are suitable for people of all incomes, in all stages of life.

What is the relationship between the adopted vision of the area and the zoning that is in place?

The City expresses its vision for growth and development in its Comprehensive Plan, a 20 year plan for the City and its potential annexation area. This vision is expressed in two ways: the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map, and a series of written policies. Policies are grouped into chapters called elements, each

addressing a different aspect of growth and development. Elements in Renton's Comprehensive Plan include: Capital Facilities, Community Design, Economic Development, Environmental, Housing, Human Services, Land Use, Parks and Recreation, Transportation, Utilities. Also included in the plan is an introduction, glossary, and a chapter on the overall vision for the City.

Specific visions and policies for the land use districts are established in the Land Use element. Each land use designation from the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map contains a purpose, vision, and set of policies to guide development in that district. It also specifies which zoning districts can be used to implement the policies. By state law the zoning district must be consistent with the policies in the Comprehensive Plan. In the Highlands Study Area there are six Comprehensive Plan Land Use designations, implemented by a variety of zones, as shown below.

Comprehensive Plan Land Use Designation	Implementing Zoning Designations
Center Village (CV)	Center Village (CV), Residential- 14 units per acre (R-14), Residential Multi-Family (RM-F), Residential Multi-Family Traditional (RM-T), Residential Multi-Family Urban (RM-U)
Commercial Corridor (CC)	Commercial Arterial (CA), Commercial Office (CO), I Light Industrial (I-L)
Commercial Neighborhood (CN)	Commercial Neighborhood (CN)
Residential Single Family (RS)	Residential- 8 units per acre (R-8), Residential Manufactured Home (RMH)
Residential Medium Density (RMD)	Residential- 10 units per acre (R-10), Residential- 14 units per acre (R-14), Residential Manufactured Home (RMH)
Residential Multi-Family (RM)	Residential Multi-Family (RM-F), Residential Multi-Family Traditional (RM-T), Residential Multi-Family Urban (RM-U)

Zoning is also established by both a map and a written document. Zoning districts set the rules and regulations that are applied to land development. Rules govern both what property can be used for, and the standards that must be followed to develop the property. Use regulations specify what types of commercial, industrial, and residential uses are allowed or prohibited. Development standards specify things such as: limitations on height and density, required areas for yards or setbacks, landscaping or parking standards, and design guidelines.

What zoning and land use changes did the Task Force on zoning recommend?

The Task Force on Zoning reviewed a smaller study area than the Phase II Task Force has decided to consider. Only a few changes were made to the land use designations and policies of the Task Force on Zoning's study area. Policy changes clarified language in the Center Village land use designation. Adjustments were also made to the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map, primarily to ensure that existing multi-family development was designated for that use. However, a major adjustment was made to the boundary of the Center Village land use district. Prior to the Task Force on Zoning's recommendation, the Center Village district primarily encompassed the commercial, and some multi-family, property on both sides of Sunset Boulevard. The Task Force of Zoning recommended expansion of this district to include most of the areas with World War II era housing.

Several zoning changes were also recommended by the Task Force on zoning. Map changes corresponded with changes made to the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map and included making adjustments for existing multi-family development, and rezoning properties that were included in the Center Village land use designation. Some changes were made the regulations in the CV zone to prohibit uses like kennels and cemeteries, but to allow other uses such as transit centers and movie theatres. Rules were changed to make it easier to build residential units over commercial development in the CV zone. Zoning regulations were changed for the R-14 zone also. Design standards were established for the development of the entire study area. One of the major effects of these changes as a whole was to provide an "up-zone" for many of the properties in the Highlands. What this means is that once the recommended changes were put into effect, property owners could develop their property more intensely than before.

Further details on the changes recommended by the Task Force on Zoning are in *Report and Recommendation Of the Highlands Area Citizen's Zoning Task Force*. A copy of this report is available on the City's website or by coming to the 6th floor of City Hall.

What are planning and zoning incentives?

Incentives are a common tool used to encourage development and redevelopment of an area. Typically, incentives are used when the City wishes to achieve a specific goal (e.g. increased density, energy efficiency, affordable housing, reserved open space), but the private market will not provide the means to achieve that goal on its own. Private development can be hampered by a perception of risk, concerns about financial returns, or by an untested business model. In this way, incentives provide a way to encourage private development to do something that might not ordinarily be done. For example, development does not typically include affordable housing units. This may be because rising land costs mean that to ensure a profitable investment, a developer needs to develop a certain number of units. As an incentive, the City offers developers who build affordable units the opportunity to build a larger number or units on the

property. This results in the ability of the developer to build the number of units necessary to make the investment worthwhile, plus the affordable units.

Incentives can take many different forms, and are best used and applied when the City goals are clear and the barriers to private development are well understood. A clear analysis of both factors will most likely result in an incentive program that creates results.

Are there any incentives for creating good, new development?

The recommended changes to land use and zoning by the Highlands Task Force on zoning provided three incentives for creating good, new development.

- The general “up-zone” of the area provided the potential for more intensive property development. Up-zoning often provides an incentive for people to re-develop property because the change in regulations can provide a greater opportunity to re-invest in property instead of holding it.
- A density bonus in the R-14 zone allows the development of up to 18 units per acre (versus a maximum of 14 units per acre without the bonus). In order to get the bonus, the project must include additional open space (a minimum of 5% of the developable area), affordable units (2 units per acre), or alley development (for at least 50% of the units).
- A density bonus in the R-14 zone that allows the development of up to 30 units per acre if 50% of the units are developed as affordable housing for people at 50% of the area median income.

The City also has authorized a multi-family housing property tax exemption, which is in place in targeted areas throughout the City, including the Highlands. This exemption waives the property taxes created by the increase in value from new (multi-family) residential improvements on the property. It does not waive taxes collected on land value, existing residential improvements, or commercial improvements. The exemption can only be applied to projects which create at least 12 attached units in the R-14 zone and at least 30 attached units in the CV zone. In the Highlands, the Harrington Square development will receive this exemption for the construction of 217 units.

Are there any incentives for improving the existing housing?

There is no formal incentive program for improving existing housing offered by the City of Renton.

Although not incentives, the City does have two programs that deal with the improvement of existing housing. Increased emphasis on code enforcement is one way the City can get some people to clean up their properties. (This option will be explored as it's own study session in July). Additionally, the City and County both have housing repair programs where low and moderate income homeowners can get help with home improvements. This program is not an

incentive, but it is one way that some of the existing housing stock could be upgraded.

In 2002, the Seattle-King County Public Health Department sent letters to the owners and occupants of the World War II era housing in the Highlands. The area had been identified for concerns about hazardous materials, such as lead based paints, and indoor air quality problems caused by molds and mildews. Public health officials offered voluntary consultation and inspection of units and participation in an abatement program if found. Only a handful of people participated.

Has any provision been made for cottage housing?

Cottage housing is an increasingly popular style of development that is allowed and encouraged in some communities. Small housing units, usually limited in size (under 1,200 square feet) are clustered together on a lot, often sharing some common facilities such as open spaces or parking areas. Housing units can be detached or attached types and can be rentals, owned fee-simple, or condominiums. Staff included cottage housing as a development possibility for the Highlands in 2006. The concept was set aside for future review as an option for development throughout the city. However, the City has adopted Planned Urban Development (PUD) regulations that could be used to build a cottage housing development in any residential zone. A PUD allows a variance in some of the underlying zoning standards (such as setbacks or lot sizes) in exchange for the provision of public benefits.

What is the feasibility of restoring Honey Creek?

Honey Creek runs along the northeastern edge of the Highlands Study area. The majority of the land surrounding the creek is City owned. However, a handful of parcels in private ownership are located in a key spot that prevent easy access to the Creek from Sunset Boulevard. Access to Honey Creek is very limited because the area of contiguous City ownership does not have any suitable access points, and because there is a lot of steep topography around the creek. A City sewer main also runs on the properties near the creek area. Providing safe public access and preserving (or re-routing) the sewer mains are two challenges to restoring Honey Creek.

There are a variety of programming and project opportunities surrounding the restoration of creeks and watersheds along both public and private properties. Habitat assessment and investigation of a watershed is usually a beginning point to then define the types of programs, long and short term, which can be developed and coordinated with various stakeholders and funding sources. Habitat enhancement, riparian restoration, bank stabilization, and bridge and culvert work are different projects that can mitigate problems such as the erosion of steep slopes surrounding the creek, decreasing numbers of fish and wildlife, fast peak water flows in the rainy season that erode the creek bank, and storm water pollutants from surrounding streets. Enhancing smaller brooks that feed

Honey Creek with water are an additional opportunity for restoration efforts. The region has a number of non-profit and government agencies that partner with community groups and cities to plan and coordinate restoration programs.

What are some incentives that the City could offer in the area (to either improve existing stock or the quality of new development) ?

Below is a list of some types of incentives that have been used in other communities.

Incentives for new development:

- pay for or install infrastructure such as water main improvements
- waive system connection fees
- reduce or waive property taxes for some types of development
- waive impact fees for parks or transportation impacts
- install improvements such as sidewalks, street trees, or parks
- waive permit fees
- development bonuses: increased density, height, clustering
- reduced development requirements: parking, street width, setbacks
- expedited permit review
- land give-aways

Incentives to improve existing development:

- home improvement grants or loans
- reduction in utility billing rates (or rebates) for energy efficient improvements
- community land trust
- subsidy program for homeownership
- Community sponsored community clean up events (could include partnerships with businesses, the City, neighborhood groups)